



# Asthma Attacks

## What Happens When You Have An Asthma Attack?

When a child with asthma suddenly starts to cough, has trouble breathing or has other asthma symptoms that keep getting worse, he is probably having an asthma "attack." When an asthma attack occurs, the airways become irritated and narrow, making it difficult to breathe.

Knowing how to tell if your child's asthma symptoms are getting worse is very important to your child's health. You can do this by watching for signs that your child is having an asthma attack.

Asthma attacks are usually described as mild, moderate or severe. Here is what to look for:

### Signs of a mild asthma attack:

- Child is alert and aware of his surroundings
- Child is able to easily speak in complete sentences
- Skin color is good
- Child's breathing is only slightly faster than usual
- Muscles are not drawn in between the ribs
- Child has mild wheezing, cough, chest tightness and/or shortness of breath
- Peak flow meter rate is 70 to 90 percent of the child's personal best

### Signs of a moderate asthma attack:

- Child is alert and aware of his surroundings
- Child has some difficulty breathing
- Child speaks in phrases because it is difficult to breathe
- Skin color may be pale
- Child's breathing rate is faster than usual
- Muscles between the ribs are drawn in slightly to moderately in order to breathe
- Child has moderate wheezing, cough, chest tightness and/or shortness of breath
- Peak flow meter rate is 50 to 70 percent of child's personal best

### Signs of a severe asthma attack:

- Child may be drowsy and less aware of what is happening
- It is very difficult for the child to breathe
- Child is only able to speak in words or short phrases due to lack of breath
- Skin color is poor
- Child's breathing rate is labored, and can be either very fast or very slow
- Child must draw in the muscles of the neck, stomach and chest in order to breathe
- Child has severe wheezing, cough, chest tightness and/or shortness of breath
- Peak flow meter rate is less than 50 percent of child's personal best

When you talk to your child's doctor about the asthma treatment plan for your child, be sure you know what to watch for and what to do if your child should have an attack. If your child is having attacks more often, your child's asthma may be getting worse. It is not always easy to tell, especially when changes take place gradually over time.

**Be sure and talk to your child's doctor if:**

- Your child's asthma symptoms get worse.
- Your child has panic attacks which cause confusion and anxiety
- Your child's asthma attacks become severe right away
- Your child's peak flow rates drop by a large amount (20 percent or more between daytime and night measurements)
- Your child's asthma medicines do not seem to work as well as they once did
- Your child must go to the doctor or emergency room often for treatment
- Your child has been admitted to a hospital or an intensive care unit for asthma treatment
- Your child's asthma attacks last longer and do not respond to treatment
- Oral anti-inflammatory medicines, such as steroids, are needed more often
- Your child's cough, wheezing, chest tightness and breathlessness increase
- Your child wakes more often at night because of asthma symptoms